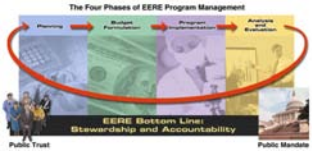
Appendix B-4
Congressional Q&As



a. Background and Purpose

Program Manager's responses to Congressional questions can affect budgets significantly.

Questions raised during the Congressional review of DOE's budget are an integral part of the Budget Development process. Responses to these questions are prepared through what is commonly called the DOE questions and answer (Q&A) process. Timely, well prepared answers to these Congressional questions can be beneficial to EERE's budget request. Program Managers prepare answers to Congressional questions and those responses can significantly affect the funding EERE receives for its programs - effective responses can help preserve funding, while poor responses can jeopardize funding.

Due to the quick response time required, Program Manager must preplan for the Q&A process.

The questions sent to the Programs, through DOE and EE from the House and Senate committees, have short lead times and require quick turnaround, so it is essential for Program Managers to preplan and anticipate the Q&A process.

This section presents an overview of the Q&A process so that program managers will be able to respond quickly and appropriately to questions and be cognizant of the importance and implications of their responses.

b. Congressional Committee Responsibilities

Questions can come from all Congressional Committees and Subcommittees responsible for the program's budget.

Spending agencies justify their portion of the Presidential Budget to the Congressional Committees through Congressional testimony and the Q&A process. Committees and subcommittees that have authorization and appropriation oversight for DOE hold hearings on the DOE budget and request information on specific programs either prior to, or subsequent to, these hearings. Questions may be submitted by the committee, subcommittee, or individual members on those committees. Since each agency bears the principal responsibility for defending its budget to Congress, the Q&A process is an opportunity for DOE to explain its programs and justify its budget request.

Committee questions are usually submitted from February to May during Congressional review of the budget.

During the Congressional review of the budget, the House and Senate conduct Authorization and Appropriations hearings. It is during this time (around February to May) that questions on DOE's budget can be expected from these committees and subcommittees.

Authorization hearings center on the DOE authorization legislation that establishes the substantive mission and direction for the agency. The Authorization Bill specifies the purpose and the recommended level of funding for programs. Questions can come from any or all of the committees with authorization oversight for the each Program's portion of the DOE budget.

Appendix B6 "Congressional Committees", gives more information on the particular committees and subcommittees involved in DOE's Budget Process.

In addition to questions from committees with authorization oversight, questions may also originate from committees and subcommittees with appropriation oversight. The appropriation bill for the energy portion of the DOE budget falls under the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriation bill, one of the 13 regular appropriations bills. The Appropriations committees of the House and Senate and their Interior and Related Agencies subcommittees oversee this appropriation bill. An appropriation bill need not appropriate all the money designated under the authorization bill.

c. Planning for Q&As

Program Managers must be able to respond to questions quickly.

Program Managers should prepare answers to anticipated questions.

Program Managers are responsible for answering Congressional questions.

Because Q&As have such a short lead time and long approval process, Program Managers must anticipate and plan for the requests. Advanced planning as well as multi-year planning documents (multi-year program plan, fact sheets, etc.) can expedite responsiveness, assure consistency in the information provided to Congress, and minimize disruption to other programs and projects. The Program Managers may develop anticipated questions well in advance of actual requests. **Program Managers can then thoroughly and effectively answer these questions before they are asked by Congress. The Offices of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries and the Office of the Assistant Secretary may also develop potentially hostile or probing questions to help prepare Program Managers for the Q&A**

process. Hostile questions are often phrased in the manner of "What if..." or "Why is DOE..." Q&As from previous budget years are also a good source of information about the kinds of questions Congress poses to the Department.

Q&A process steps:

- ***Deputy Assistant Secretaries receives questions and assigns to Program Managers.***
- ***Program Managers review questions and assign them to program managerment teams.***
- ***Program management team develops responses to questions.***
- ***Program Managers review responses and make comments.***
- ***Program management team revises responses based on comments.***
- ***Deputy Assistant Secretaries review and comment on responses.***
- ***Program Managers and team revise responses based on comments.***

Responses must not ask for an increase in proposed funding and must not contradict the initial budget request.

d. Responding to Congressional Questions

The Process. Responses to questions received from the Congressional committees are usually developed by program managers and reviewed by the Deputy Assistant Secretaries.

The Deputy Assistant Secretaries receive Congressional committee and subcommittee inquiries specific to the portion of the budget. The inquiries are then passed along to the appropriate Program Managers for action.

Program Managers review the questions and assign them to program managerment teams according to their programmatic responsibilities and the specific questions asked.

Program Managers and team develop responses to questions based on directives and strategies received from the Assistant Secretary and/or the Deputy Assistant Secretaries. They may seek input, as necessary, from the field offices and laboratories, their staff, or outside consultants.

Program managers review the responses prior to submittal to the Deputy Assistant Secretaries. They send comments back to the program management team for resolution. **The Program Managers revise and rework their responses based on the comments.**

The Deputy Assistant Secretaries also review the responses in the context of the entire Congressional request. **Their comments are sent back to the Program Managers, and possibly to program management teams for resolution.**

Responses to questions received before Congressional testimony for the Authorization or Appropriation hearing is given are incorporated into the Deputy Assistant Secretaries' briefing book that they will use during the hearings. Responses to questions sent to DOE after the Congressional hearings are usually sent to EERE and to the Congressional Committee that initiated the request.

Content. Because DOE responses to Congressional questions can have a significant influence on Congressional Appropriations, it is important to have a strategy for answering them persuasively.

The Assistant Secretary and the Deputy Assistant Secretaries may give directives and/or guidance for responding to questions and developing an effective strategy. This strategy is the basis by which to develop all responses for consistency and impact.

Elements of good responses:

- Consistent and does not contradict initial budget request
- Supports previous impact and capability statements
- Remarks on benefits of programs, e.g., efficiency, oil savings, etc.
- Builds on past accomplishments
- Highlights significance to current goals
- Follows strategy developed for answering questions.

"For The Record" Format: questions and the corresponding answers are stated consecutively—most often used.

"As If Asked" Format: used for questions intended to appear if they were asked and answered during the Congressional hearing.

Format. Different Congressional committees have different format guidelines for answering their questions and often specify this in the request. There are two basic formats for responses—"for the record" and "as if asked." In the "for the record" format questions and the corresponding answers are stated consecutively. This format is the most common and most likely format for questions. The "as if asked" format, rarely used, is for questions intended to appear if they were asked and answered during the Congressional hearing.

The format guidelines included with the Congressional questions should be followed. If the format for answers is not specified, these general guidelines should be followed:

- Limit responses to one page when possible
- Type questions directly above each corresponding response
- Include responses to all questions in the same order they were asked
- Use titles ("centerheads") to identify the subject of question sets
- After a question set, type who prepared the response, including their office and phone number

- Include tables or attachments if necessary to answer the question.

f. Additional Resources

Previous Q&As are available on the network.

Often Congressional questions are similar from year to year so answers from previous years can be a helpful resource for program managers when developing responses to new committee and subcommittee questions.

Previous Q&As on specific topics can be searched by using the **FIND FILES** command in Word Perfect

- Type in exactly the word or phrase you want to search for
- Under the **FILE** menu choose **FIND FILES** to open the dialog box
- Specify what directory or subdirectory to search under
- Choose the box "Search Word Perfect files only"
- Click on **FIND**

The program will search all files, in the directories specified, for the word or phrase. It will then list all the Word Perfect files